

# ***Organizing Students***

## ***By Brittany Courtot***

### ***Classroom Rules & Routines***

Within daily life routines can quickly turn into ruts that cause one's eyes to glaze, however in many aspects of life routines or rules are essential to a successful outcome. Consider sports, how bowlers and golfers seem to go through self-made dances and gestures before the ball ever leaves their hands or their clubs hits the ball. In either instance, the use of routine is critical to the players in being effective – to the point that many require silence to focus on the steps involved in their self-tailored processes. Not everything requires a routine to be effective, in fact many people avoid routine like the plague to escape boredom or sameness. However, when managing large groups of people to focus on particular things, routines can enable groups to be more effective in meeting their goals. This is the reason that routines in a classroom are essential to maximizing student learning.

Harry K. Wong, an educator of 35 years and writer/lecturer on education, said that,

Contrary to what many people believe, the number-one problem in the classroom is not discipline—it is the lack of procedures and routines. Classroom management has nothing to do with discipline. You manage a store; you do not discipline a store. You manage a classroom; you do not discipline a classroom. Behavior will rarely become a problem when effective teaching is already taking place. (The Well-Managed Classroom p.2)

Wong asserts that a proactive approach in terms of routines and rules can help manage a classroom and lessen undesired behaviors. To do this, a teacher must make sure that the rules and routines are clearly established early on and reviewed to inspire memorization in students. The key is that the rules/expectations are both verbalized and written down for the students to constantly see, this way the rules begin to become familiarized in the student's minds. Therefore, procedures such as signing out or taking a pass to leave the room and if you have to raise your hand or not to answer a question, are

turned into habits. These habits of the classroom encourage students to be productive and stay engaged.

Procedures in the classroom also ensure that students stay involved in their work without wasting time on correcting students' behavior or instruction time. Essentially, the more a teacher does on the first day in terms of setting up routines and rules, the more students can learn throughout the school year without interruptions. On the other end of the spectrum, when students know the routines they can easily transition from one thing to the next and hone in on what's more important. It also breeds a sense of responsibility in students, which boosts morale and furthers student's confidence in dealing with any situation, expected or otherwise. These procedures create a structure to maximize learning time, but also they lessen the teacher's workload and lower the student's frustrations from either repetition or confusion.

Teachers should consider thoughtfully and creatively a wide range of potential situations or snafus in their classrooms to address proactively in their classroom's rule. Overall there are no right or wrong rules a teacher can implement as long as the rules aid in the efficiency and safe/calm nature of their classroom environment.

When crafting rules teachers should be aware of certain rule characteristics that works in getting student to follow them. The first characteristic to consider is involving the class in creating the rules and routines, as this gives the students a sense of ownership over the rules and are more likely to follow them. Secondly, a teacher should keep rules short, clear, positive and to the point so as not to confuse or intimidate students with a flood of negative information pounding down onto them. Thirdly, teachers should include humor into classroom rules when they can, for example teacher/writer Rick Morris uses music from old TV shows to signal different routines or a switch of activities. Lastly, teachers should not be afraid to change rules that aren't working. Rules can sometimes treated as experimental, changing as you get to know what works and what doesn't work for particular students.

Some common, important procedures to consider are the following: procedures for absent students, [quieting a class](#), what to do with students who finish early, starting a class, leaving the room, group work, getting up from their desk, and dismissing the class at the end of the period. The solutions for any of these procedures are up to the teacher

gauging their students and filtering that through their own teaching philosophies. For example, quieting a class for the beginning of the class can be done in a number of ways ranging from visual cues (switching the lights off) to musical cues (clapping or music).

Overall rules and procedures require creative and the effective solutions, which can alter based upon one's perspectives or grade they are teaching. Rules and routines are critical to maximizing student learning and minimizing the stress and confusion that potentially could be within the classroom. Something else that is critical towards maximizing student learning is ensuring that students are engaged and creative in pursuing their goals.

### **Student Engagement & Creativity**

There is an old idiom that states, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." Simply put, it means that you can tell/show something to someone yet you cannot force he/she to accept it or do something. The same applies in the classroom to an extent, teachers cannot *force* their students to absorb our lessons, but can *encourage* their students to engage into the content through student interests, fun activities and exciting perspectives on the content.

What is engagement exactly? It has long been discovered that engagement is intrinsic, meaning it comes from an inner desire for internal satisfaction such as understanding or improvement unlike external rewards such as grades or prizes. Many researchers argue that children are motivated by their own thirst for the aforementioned internal satisfactions.

Some of these internal drives are competence, community contribution, and meaningful or relevant work. The first is competence, where one feels that they've been successful in what they set out to do or learn, succeeding in this can drive people to engage further. On the other hand however, feeling as though one has failed can make it continuously harder to participate or try again. Picture a student who has a really strong ability in English, which can be seen in their engagement in English Class and outside the classroom in a school writing club. However, that same student struggles with Math class and over time that student begins to disengage from Math in totality. Therefore, it helps for a student to have victories in order to engage, no matter how small they might seem.

Secondly is community contribution, which is when one feels that they've made a contribution to a group. When one contributes to a group a bond of acceptance and feeling of safety blooms therein. In a classroom community this bond of solidarity occurs between students, their peers and the teacher. Lastly is meaningful work, where one feels that they've connected the schoolwork to something important to future goals or the now. Students will not be engaged to learn something that has no usefulness in their lives, present or future. However, students come into a classroom already with pre-dispositions or perspectives on learning – which expands beyond their deeper need for the above-mentioned internal rewards.

When children are developing, their environment at home initially molds their approach towards learning. Therefore, a child whose home environment has many educational stimuli around nurtures a positive attitude towards learning in that child, the tells of that outcome are seen through autonomy and a real willingness to learn. The opposite of this rings true, where a negative attitude towards learning can hinder positive learning attitude from growing later in life, thusly lowering a child's engagement in their classroom. Teachers cannot control what home environments instill in children about learning, but teachers can attempt to figure out those attitudes and strive to alter them accordingly. Some studies say that what the teachers does in the classroom in terms of learning attitudes has a larger impact on children than what happens at home.

But what does engagement look like in the classroom? Well, that's tough question for teachers to answer. Is engagement something that we can see externally, such as students appearing to pay attention and doing assignments? Or is engagement something that only surfaces inside the students? If the latter, how can a lack of visual cues ever hope to help teachers gauge student's investment in learning? Michael et al (2013) argued that the general breakdown of the components to gauge engagements were the following:

1. Engaged in thought involves a psychological investment in learning and mastery of academic material, as well as the desire for challenge. Planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's thinking, along with self-control, are indications that one is engaged in thought.
2. Engaged in feeling refers to students' emotions regarding their relationships with others in the school environment (e.g., teachers, peers) and the general sense of belonging in school that comes from such relationships. Engaged in feeling also refers to students' sense of

connectedness to, interest in, and passion for academic content. This is often accompanied by a strong sense of confidence regarding academic abilities.

3. Engaged in action refers to the various activities and involvements in school that are directed toward learning and academic tasks. Signs of active engagement include attending and contributing to class, following school rules, completing assignments, studying, and concentrating on academic tasks. (Michael et al., 2013)

A further element of gauging student engagement for teachers to consider is to monitor if students are taking their new understandings from the material and using it in their own lives – which brings it back to the aforementioned relevance.

Now that we know the what and the look of engagement, how can teachers engage their own students? To engage teachers must build a strong rapport with students and the students with their peers. If teachers develop a rapport, a friendship with students, students will begin to see the teacher as more human and that the teacher is genuinely interested in their success. This social element of student investment is critical, because if a student feels involved or supported they also feel respected and that creates an environment that student feel at ease in so they can explore the content. Thusly, students that are shy around a particular type of person (boisterous people) might engage in one class with other types of people (calm people) easier.

Harkening back to relevance, another engagement method is to make the content both relevant and exciting. This enables student to see how the information will help them succeed in a matter important to them in the present or towards a future goal. The National Writing Project suggests that English teachers make writing come alive by having students write for real audience, such as writing editorials for newspapers or publishing their creative writings.

Another key engagement method is to give students choices and control within their learning or assessments of learning. This enables students to relate content to their own interests and real-life goals easier than a teacher trying to do the same and juggling many students' diverse likes and goals. This is why a wave of project-based learning schools are cropping up, schools where students driven their educations through self-initiated projects. If students are driving their own learning, there is a passionate for the content that teachers could only hope to recreate otherwise.

Unfortunately, studies in the 1980's, 90's and onwards have illustrated falling engagement in students in the classroom and increases in student's faltering academically. (Meece & McColskey, 1997). The reason for falling investment is partly due to many teacher not adopting the methods mentioned above or any other methods, but there are other factors at play as well. Schools today tend to focus more on memorization or rote learning to create higher scores on standardized tests. Firstly, these tests constrain teachers from creating captivating lesson, just for the mere sake of time management. Teachers only have so much time during the day and when that time is eaten up by more and more high-stakes standardized test preparation, the less relevance and interest-driven instruction a classroom can had. Secondly and lastly, even parents or the community can hinder engagement through misunderstanding the new methods that teachers use, some of which might seem unproductive at a glance yet are actually hitting the core learning goals.

However, teachers must persist in engaging students for the benefits outweigh the hurdles leapt over to get there. Engaged students have been found to be more satisfied, as they receive those internal rewards, which leads to more effort and higher grades/text scores. Students who are invested academically are less likely to drop out of school, which is a real issue today more and more. Engagement has also been found to lead to less disciplinary problems or incidents of misbehavior as students are really focused on the absorbing the content rather than fooling around. Getting a student's attention can be real challenge for teachers considering the age of nearly instant information that we live in bathing our students in constant stimulation. Therefore, teachers must be creative in their methods to keep students focused, so they can lower the chance of students misbehaving.

Speaking of creativity, engagement requires a lot of creative ideas and projects in order to keep students absorbed. However, due to standardized tests and other commitments, much of the time creativity gets put onto the backburner of education. This debate of creativity in the classroom has been going on since John Dewey argued for creativity in the classroom in 1916, but more than ever the question remains: Has creativity lost its place in the classroom? Psychologist Michael Hogan at the National University of Galway Ireland argues that,

...It is clear that much of education is focused on standardized testing and memory recall. In Bloom's classic taxonomy of learning outcomes, remembering information (knowledge) is the foundation stone in his hierarchy of learning outcomes. However, higher-order learning outcomes are also desirable: beyond memory of information we should seek to cultivate comprehension, analysis, and evaluation skills — and at the top of the hierarchy Bloom places *synthesis*, which implies creativity and possibly the creation of some new knowledge or other artifact of culture. Without synthesis and the creative push to constantly create something new, cultural evolution would cease. While not all creative products result in positive evolutionary outcomes, we nevertheless depend on the creativity of people to help us survive, adapt and flourish.... (Hogan, 2012)

Plainly, Galway argues that creativity has other skills embedded within it that should translate well into settings other than art or music class – although both cultivate said skills. Creativity is multi-faceted, in that if one is creative they are also good at taking risks, are self-directed, ask questions/analyze materials, seek to understand something and thusly are motivated individuals within their creative pursuits. All these skills are useful in other content areas besides art and music, in fact many are life skills that are important for students throughout their lives including a sense of self-motivated and direction, which loops us back around to engagement. In order to keep creativity in schools teachers and educators need to redefine creativity's image in education from something “extra” or “special” to one that is universal and globally important in its usefulness. A possible avenue to this end is to incorporate projects into one's classroom, which are creative or use creative processes so as to show the physical manifestation of creativity's global importance.

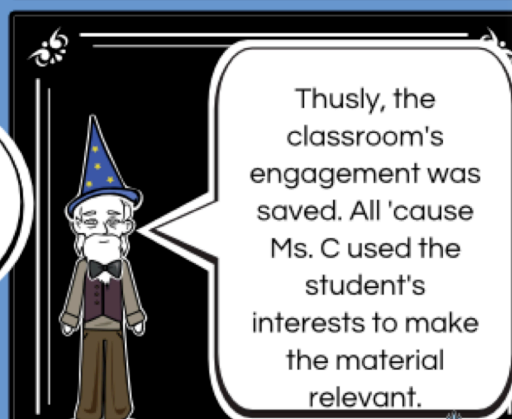
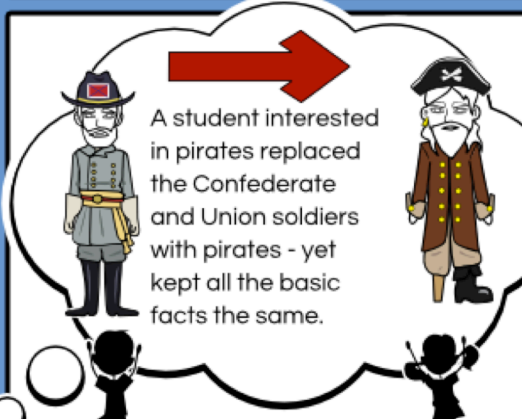
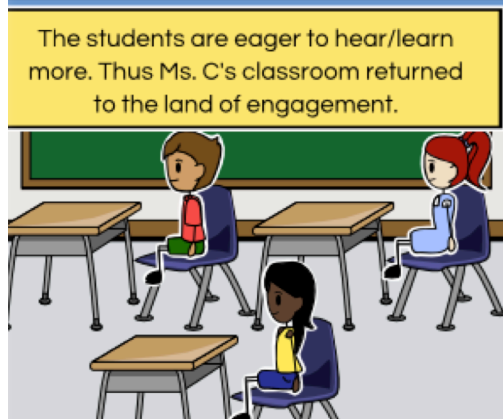
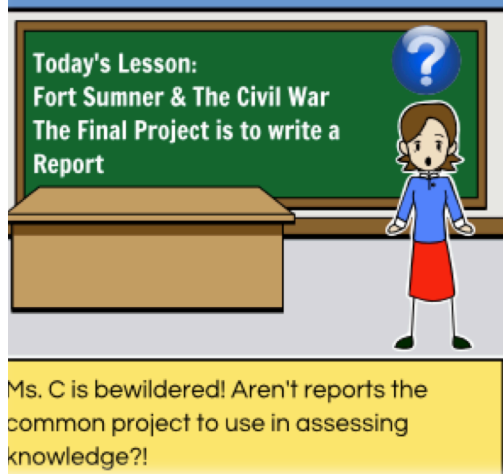
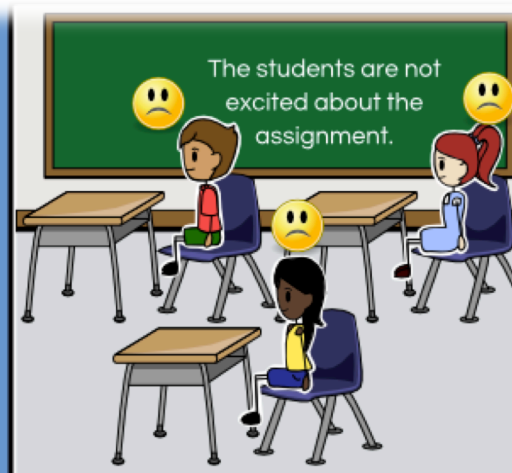
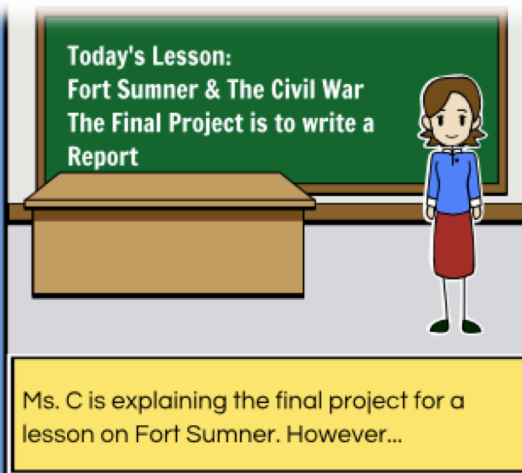
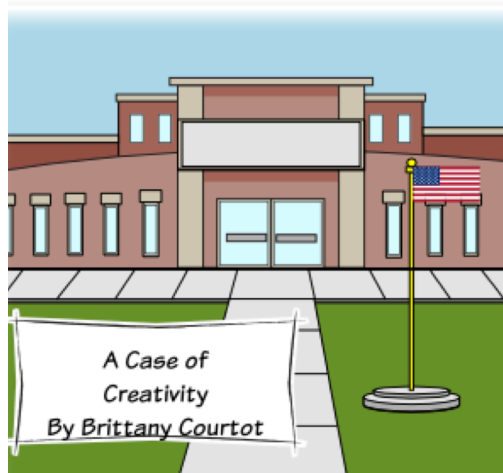


Figure 1: These comic panels were made using [Storyboardthat.com](https://www.storyboardthat.com/).



## ***Management of Student using Technology***

Technology is a tool for the classroom, just like any other tool before it. However, just like any other tool it can be misused if people aren't taught the rules of the tool, so to speak. More and more students are disengaging from class in order to use some sort of other technology such as computers for leisure activities (computer games, social media, etc.) or cell phones for texting. Teachers must be monitoring their student's use of technology within the classroom, but is that all that teachers can accomplish?

Karen Hume, an educational writer for Tech Magazine, suggested that the first thing to do was to make students understand that technology is a tool and have students,



“complete preparatory work away from the equipment. For example, storyboarding before creating a video or a PowerPoint/Keynote presentation ensures that students will know what they are going to do and can get to work right away.” (Hume 2011) In this fashion

students are able to better appreciate the technology and are less likely to abuse its usage.” To facilitate this, teachers must establish their technology policies at the beginning of the school year, putting into place proactive responses such as cueing students to turn off computers or phones by flicking off the light switch.

However, students will always strive to find loopholes around the rules to use technology, as Anita s. Charles, Direction of Teacher Education at Bates Collage, discovered in her case study at Riverpark High School in New England. Students had gotten to the point that they were hiding phones in pencil cases to sneak them inside the classroom. Yet, overall Anita Charles found that rules in schools for cell phone and

technology use were something of “a grey area...a management issue”. Some times students were allowed to use phones during one part of the day, say in the hallways or at lunch, and other times those students were chastised for doing that same thing another day. Both teachers and students were confused and thusly nothing got better in terms of addressing the school’s concern about texting in class.

The best advice for teachers managing technology isn’t to take the phones away, as there is some legal tape mixed up into that, but to clearly give the students the parameters then experiment with what works and what doesn’t work with technology policies. However what helps is if the teacher and student have a rapport, the students are more likely to forgo the phone use if the teacher says not to because they respect that teacher. One last tidbit of advice is following the adage of, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” . A teacher can do this by [using phones/ipods/etc. within their lesson](#) in a structured and monitored fashion.

In organizing students, the main thing to be considered across the board is to make judgment calls based on knowing your students by being proactive in telling the rules and procedures early on. This is so habits are developed quickly and instructional time is not wasted for both you and your students.

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